

**Commissioner's Weekly Field Memo**  
**Friday, January 4, 2013**

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**Thursday** (January 10): [Safety, Emergency Plans](#) due  
January 25: [NECAP demographic files](#) deadline  
February 15: [NECAP demographic files corrections](#) due

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### **Notes from Commissioner Gist**

#### **1. Commissioner develops talking points on Rhode Island Diploma System**

I hope you enjoyed the school vacation and that everything has gone well in your schools as teachers and students return to class. I was glad to have the opportunity to meet with the RISSA Executive Committee yesterday (January 4) to discuss a number of issues that will be before us in the new year. One of the key issues will be the implementation of our Diploma System, which for the first time sets specific expectations for student performance on NECAP assessments. As you know, the current junior class (Class of 2014) must score partially proficient or better on the NECAP

assessments that they completed in October. Students who fall below the level of partially proficient must take the test again in their senior year, and they must show improvement in order to be eligible to earn a diploma. We intend to release NECAP scores to the public on February 8, and many of you may face questions about the new Diploma System from your School Board or Committee, from parents, and from the community. To help you prepare for these questions, I have drafted some talking points that you may wish to use or to modify:

Nearly two years ago (March 2011), following months of hearings and public meetings, the Board of Regents approved a new [Diploma System](#) for Rhode Island.

The goal of the system is to maintain a high standard for graduation and to ensure that schools provide all students with adequate support and with multiple opportunities to meet the graduation requirements.

The Rhode Island Diploma System is based on multiple measures, not on state assessments only.

In order to earn a high-school diploma, students have to meet the standard on all three of the graduation requirements:

- success on state assessments;
- completion of coursework; and
- demonstration of proficiency through performance-based assessments (for example, senior projects or electronic portfolios of work).

No single element is more important than the others. Rhode Island is not and will not become a state that recognizes and values only a single test.

One of the graduation requirements is attaining a scoring level of at least “partially proficient” on the NECAP high-school (Grade 11) assessments in mathematics and reading.

All of us are concerned that a large number of high-school students may score “significantly below proficient.”

As we work to ensure that all of our graduates are ready for success in the challenging careers of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we believe that lowering our standards is not the solution.

Therefore, the Diploma System requires that our schools provide additional, intensive support and instruction to all students who fall below the minimum score.

These students will take the state assessment again in their senior year, and they can meet this graduation requirement by showing improvement, even if they still fall below the level of partially proficient.

With a year of instruction and support, all students should be able to show improvement.

Also, everyone should be aware that the Diploma System includes provisions for appealing decisions and for waivers “in those rare cases in which the state assessment is not a valid means of determining the proficiency of individual students.” (section L-6-3.3)

The Rhode Island Diploma System demands a lot of our teachers, of our students, and of their families.

Earning a high-school diploma is a challenge that requires many years of hard work, but we want to ensure that when our students graduate from high school they will be well prepared for success in college, careers, and life.

Another issue that may come up in conversations about our Diploma System is a mistaken belief about NECAP assessments. It is important to be aware that nothing in the design, construction, or administration of the NECAP assessments prevents them from being used in the process of making decisions about educational programs and referrals, promotion, and graduation. Confusion about this point arose because of some language in the initial interpretation guide that NECAP states used. That language said:

NECAP results are intended to evaluate how well students and schools are achieving the learning targets contained in the *Grade Level Expectations*. NECAP was designed primarily to provide detailed school-level results and accurate summary information about individual students. NECAP was not designed to provide, in isolation, detailed student-level diagnostic information for formulating individual instructional plans. However, NECAP results can be used, along with other measures, to identify students' strengths and weaknesses. NECAP is only one indicator of student performance and should not be used for referring students to special education or for making promotion and/or graduation decisions. (Highlights added)

Clearly, the point of this passage, in context, is that single-administration NECAP results alone should not be used for making

graduation decisions. We have since clarified the language in this passage to accurately describe the proper use of the NECAP assessments, and this language is in our current [guide](#):

**Use of NECAP Student-Level Results** NECAP results are intended to evaluate how well students and schools are achieving the learning targets contained in the *Grade Level and Grade Span Expectations*. NECAP was designed primarily to provide detailed school-level results and accurate summary information about individual students. NECAP was not designed to provide, in isolation, detailed student-level diagnostic information for formulating individual instructional plans. However, NECAP results can be used, along with other measures, to identify students' strengths and weaknesses. **NECAP is only one indicator of student performance and results of a single NECAP test administration should not be used for referring students to special education or for making promotion and/or graduation decisions.** (Highlight added)

Neither the first version of the guide nor the clarification referred to test construction, design, or administration, but rather to the philosophy about the use of test results. I hope that you find these talking points and this clarification to be useful in any conversations you may have regarding standardized assessments and our Diploma System.

## **2. RIDE reviews school-safety, emergency-response plans; posts resources on school safety, crisis management**

As we return to school this week, the memory and the pain from the shootings in Newtown, Connecticut, remain all too fresh in our minds. We have been fortunate that our schools in Rhode

Island have been safe places for our students and educators, and we will continue to do everything we can to support and maintain school safety. Since the school shooting, we have gathered a number of resources on school safety and on crisis counseling, which may be useful to you and members of your team if issues or concerns arise in any of your schools. We included links to many of these resources in a Field Memo Alert last month, which we have posted on my page on our website:

<http://www.ride.ri.gov/Commissioner/fieldmemos/Field%20Memo%20alert%2012-17-12.pdf>

In addition, Education Secretary Arne Duncan has sent a message to all U.S. school districts

(<http://www.ed.gov/blog/2012/12/resources-for-schools-to-prepare-for-and-recover-from-crisis/>), sharing some resources from the U.S. Department of Education Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools Technical Assistance Center (<http://rem.s.ed.gov/>), including helping youth and children recover from traumatic events (<http://rem.s.ed.gov/HelpingYouthandChildrenRecoverFromTraumaticEvents.aspx>) and creating and updating school emergency-management plans (<http://rem.s.ed.gov/CreatingAndUpdatingSchoolEmergencyManagementPlans.aspx>). You may find some of these resources helpful as well.

As I noted to you in my previous field memo, we are reviewing all school-safety and emergency-response plans in order to see if we can learn lessons from the shootings in Connecticut and from the best thinking of one another. I will be meeting next week with Colonel O'Donnell, of the State Police, and I understand that some members of the General Assembly intend to look into the issue of



school safety to see if any state statutes on safety need updates or revision.

To help us move this review forward, please send me copies of your school-safety and emergency-response plans, either by e-mail, to [angela.teixeira@ride.ri.gov](mailto:angela.teixeira@ride.ri.gov), or by surface mail, to Angela Teixeira's attention, at RIDE, 255 Westminster St., Providence 02903. If the your plans are available online, you may simply send Angela Teixeira a URL link so that we can access your plans that way. Please submit the materials to us by the close of business on **Thursday** (January 10). Please let me know if you have any questions about this request.

### **3. Health Department requests regular attendance reports to help track flu outbreaks**

As you may know, the Department of Health is closely watching data on all aspects of the spread of flu in Rhode Island. The Department of Health uses data as a tool to identify clusters of illness and to expedite response to outbreaks of flu, when possible. Unfortunately, the State Medical Epidemiologist has informed us that, at best, only half of our schools are reporting absentee rates with any regularity.

Please check with your data managers to ensure that your LEA is providing regular attendance reports, and please impress upon your team the importance of submitting attendance data daily. More complete reporting will lead to a better understanding of the spread of flu in our state, particularly among children. We all must do our part to help our colleagues at Health respond to clusters and outbreaks of the flu and to keep our schools safe and healthy places for learning.

## From RIDE

### ***Action Items:***

#### **4. Annual School Health Report forms to be posted January 14**

The *Rules and Regulations for School Health Programs*, Section 2.5, require all LEAs and nonpublic-school authorities to submit to the Commissioner of Education and to the Director of Health on an annual basis a report pertaining to the school or district health program. The Annual School Health Report provides a standardized template to fulfill this reporting requirement and allows the RIDE and the Department of Health to monitor school and district compliance with school health-related statutes, regulations, and protocols that ensure the health and safety of students and staff at all Rhode Island schools.

The Annual School Health Report template will be available through eRIDE on January 14. You will receive an e-mail notification from RIDE when the report is open for completion and submission via eRIDE.

For a [preview](#) of the Annual School Health Report and for assistance in understanding what will be required, please see the [Annual School Health Report Tutorial](#).

### ***Awards and Recognitions:***

#### **5. Presidential Award for Excellence in Mathematics and Science Teaching (PAEMST) nominations now open**

Does your LEA have outstanding secondary (grades 7-12) mathematics and science teachers whom you would like to recognize? The Presidential Award for Excellence in Mathematics and Science Teaching (PAEMST) is the highest honor that a kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup>-grade mathematics or science teacher in the United States can receive for outstanding teaching. What better way to acknowledge excellence in your schools than to nominate the teachers who exemplify their profession!

The process to nominate teachers is simple. Go to the PAEMST website, at [www.paemst.org](http://www.paemst.org), and fill in the on-line form. Once the nomination is submitted, the nominated teacher will be notified and provided with information about the application process.

Here are the eligibility criteria for nominees; candidates must:

- teach mathematics or science at the 7<sup>th</sup>- 12<sup>th</sup> grade level in a U.S. public or nonpublic school;
- hold at least a Bachelor's degree from an accredited institution;
- be a full-time employee of the school or school district as determined by state and district policies, and teach K-12 students at least 50 percent of the time;
- have at least 5 years of full-time, K-12 mathematics or science teaching experience prior to the current school year;
- be a U.S. Citizen or Permanent Resident; and
- not have received the PAEMST award at the national level in any prior competition or category.

Rhode Island has many wonderful teachers, and those you nominate could be state or national Presidential Awardees for Excellence in Teaching Mathematics and Science for 2013.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Peter McLaren, a science specialist at RIDE, at 222-8454, or by e-mail, at [peter.mclaren@ride.ri.gov](mailto:peter.mclaren@ride.ri.gov).

#### **6. High-school seniors can apply to be Rhode Island delegates to National Youth Science Camp**

Two high-school seniors will be chosen to represent Rhode Island as delegates to the National Youth Science Camp (June 26- July 20). Delegates have demonstrated exceptional academic achievement, leadership in school and community activities, and a genuine interest in the sciences. Selected delegates attend the National Youth Science Camp the summer after their high-school graduation at no expense, transportation included.

The National Youth Science Camp is one of the premier programs in secondary science education. Since its inception in 1963, the summer program has offered educational forums and recreational activities that encourage the development of thoughtful scientific leadership.

The National Youth Science Camp is a residential science-education program for young scientists the summer after they graduate from high school. Students from around the country are challenged academically in exciting lectures and hands-on studies, and they have opportunities to participate in an outdoor adventure program, to gain a new and deep appreciation for the great outdoors, and to establish friendships that last a lifetime.

Students can apply to be delegates at:

<http://2013.nysc.org/about-the-national-youth-science-camp/apply/>

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Peter McLaren, a science specialist at RIDE, at 222-8454, or by e-mail, at [peter.mclaren@ride.ri.gov](mailto:peter.mclaren@ride.ri.gov).

### ***Data Collection:***

#### **7. RIDE to begin collecting work-assignment data on teacher assistants, noncertified staff through new data system**

On November 16, the RIDE Teacher Assistant (TA) Web Reporting System was suspended. LEAs are no longer required to submit TA Reports within the RICERT System.

RIDE will send the professional-development data that have been stored in the RICERT System since 2002 to each LEA electronically for their records. Teacher assistants may request a copy of their professional-development records from the LEA where they have been employed. Teacher assistants and LEAs are responsible for maintaining professional-development records.

In the fall of 2013, work-assignment data for all noncertified personnel will be collected through the new Personnel Data Collection System. This spring, we will communicate details about work-assignment reporting for noncertified staff.

For more information, contact Mary Keenan, at [mary.keenan@ride.ri.gov](mailto:mary.keenan@ride.ri.gov) or 401-222-8497.

## ***Common Core:***

### **8. Digital Learning Now provides resources on adopting the Common Core**

Our Office of Multiple Pathways would like to let you know about this resource regarding digital learning and the Common Core State Standards:

The Digital Learning Now! Smart Series is a collection of interactive papers that will provide specific guidance for policy makers and educational leaders regarding adoption of Common Core Standards and the shift to personal digital learning. Topics include: funding high-access learning environments, building comprehensive learner profiles, preparing for online assessments, moving to competency-based learning models, financing student achievement, building big data policies, improving the teaching profession with blended learning, and more. The first three papers are complete and available online at:

<http://www.digitallearningnow.com/dln-smart-series/>

Helpful One-Pagers:

Funding the Shift to Digital Learning: 3 Strategies for Funding Sustainable High-Access Environments Infographic – <http://digitallearningnow.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/DLN-Smart-Series-Infographic-1-Final.pdf>

Data Backpacks: Portable Records and Learner Profiles Infographic - <http://digitallearningnow.com/wp->

[content/uploads/2012/10/GS-Backpack-Infograph\\_10-23-2012.pdf](http://www.digitalllearningnow.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/GS-Backpack-Infograph_10-23-2012.pdf)

Getting Ready for Online Assessments Infographic -  
[http://www.digitalllearningnow.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/OA-Infographic\\_12-21-2012a.pdf](http://www.digitalllearningnow.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/OA-Infographic_12-21-2012a.pdf)

### ***Assessments:***

#### **9. PARCC releases new Technology Guidelines document**

RIDE is pleased to announce the release of detailed guidelines regarding the technology specifications for the PARCC assessment. The guidelines document provides minimum and recommended specifications for computer hardware, input devices, and security requirements; the document also suggests recommended levels of bandwidth that will support the instructional and assessment needs of schools. The document does not yet set minimum bandwidth specifications, however.

Schools, districts, and states can use these guidelines to determine the eligibility of existing computers as test-taking devices for the 2014-15 PARCC assessments. The information in this document is intended to answer questions about whether both current computer inventories and new instructional hardware that schools may purchase as they implement the Common Core States Standards will meet requirements for the PARCC 2014-15 online assessment.

*Technology Guidelines for PARCC Assessments Version 2.0* refines, and therefore supersedes, the Version 1.0 document released last April; you can access the new document at:

[www.parcconline.org/technology](http://www.parcconline.org/technology).

If you need your PARCC Readiness Tool password reset, if you have questions, or if you need any other help on this matter, please call Mike Ferry, at 222-8258, or e-mail him at [Michael.Ferry@ride.ri.gov](mailto:Michael.Ferry@ride.ri.gov)

***Educator Evaluations:***

**10. RIDE to conduct surveys for feedback on educator evaluations**

RIDE will be sending links to online surveys for teachers, building administrators, and central-office administrators to help collect feedback on the new teacher and building-administrator evaluation and support systems being implemented in Rhode Island. The surveys are part of the ongoing plan to capture feedback from a broad range of stakeholders. All survey responses will be confidential, and the feedback we collect will help us identify successes and challenges and will guide ongoing improvements. We will include the link for the surveys in a future Field Memo, and we will be asking all superintendents and heads of school to share the surveys with their staff members.

***Training and webinars:***

**11. Dates added for required Rhode Island Model - Module 1 training for evaluators - *Reminder***

In response to feedback from the field, RIDE has added four additional Module 1 training sessions for personnel evaluating teachers. The new sessions are being offered on January 15 and



18 at the West Bay Collaborative. Module 1 is required for all personnel evaluating teachers in LEAs implementing the Rhode Island Model, and, to date, the training has been very well received. On the Module 1 exit survey, 88 percent of participants rated the training as high quality or very high quality.

For additional information about the Edition II Module 1 trainings, including registration directions, please go to the Training Registration page on the RIDE website, at:

<http://www.ride.ri.gov/EducatorQuality/EducatorEvaluation/TrainingReg.aspx>.

## **12. RIDE launches Private Growth Model Visualization tool**

The Private Growth Model Visualization (GMV) tool will be available **Monday** (January 7) for central-office and school-building administrators. The Private GMV tool offers access to individual student-growth and achievement data. New school- and student-level features allow for meaningful and comprehensive exploration into student-achievement data. The private GMV can be accessed through the RIDEmap, at:

<https://ridemap.ride.ri.gov/default.aspx>

We have scheduled a series of regional trainings for central-office and school-building administrators. These sessions will provide hands-on training on the private GMV. Participants can register through eRide, at:

<http://www.ride.ri.gov/applications/ridecalendar.aspx>

Private GMV training sessions:

January 25 – Warwick Public Library, 600 Sandy Lane (9:30 – 11 a.m.)

January 28 – Pawtucket Administration Building, 286 Main St. (9:30 – 11 a.m.)

January 29 – Tower Street School, 93 Tower St., Westerly (9:30 – 11 a.m.)

January 30 – Middletown Administration Oliphant Building, 26 Oliphant Lane (9:30 – 11 a.m.)

For more information about the private GMV, please contact Ana Karantonis ([Ana.Karantonis@ride.ri.gov](mailto:Ana.Karantonis@ride.ri.gov)).

## **From the U.S. Department of Education**

### **13. Department schedules webinar series on environmental education, green schools**

Through the [Green Strides Webinar Series](#), hundreds of state, local, and school officials and their communities are tuning in to learn how to reduce their schools' environmental impact and costs, improve health and wellness, and provide effective environmental education, including STEM, green careers, and civic engagement. The series provides administrators, educators, parents, and interested third parties the resources to move toward the exemplary levels of U.S. Department of Education Green Ribbon Schools:

Wednesday (January 9), 4 – 5 p.m.: [Using Remote Sensing to Quantify Changes over Time \(NASA\)](#)

January 16, 4 – 5 p.m.:

[Food for Thought: Space Food and Nutrition \(NASA\)](#)

January 23, 2 - 3 p.m. [Farm to School Program \(USDA\)](#)

January 30, 4 - 5 p.m. [Eyes on the Earth-  
Global Climate Change \(NASA\)](#)

February 6, 4 - 5 p.m. [An Energy Literate Citizenry from K to  
Grey \(DOE\)](#)

February 13, 4 - 5 p.m. [Emerging □Green□ Technologies  
\(NASA\)](#)

February 20, 4 - 5 p.m. [Climate Time Machine \(NASA\)](#)

#### **14. Applications available for 2013-14 Teaching Ambassador Fellowships**

Applications are currently available for the Department's 2013-14 Teaching Ambassador Fellowship, offering highly motivated and innovative school teachers and instructional leaders the unique opportunity to contribute their knowledge and experience to the national dialogue on education, and, in turn, facilitate discussions with educators across the country. Since 2008, this competitive program has enabled a total of 80 outstanding teachers to work with the agency. Once again, the fellowship includes two tracks. Up to six Washington Fellows will become full-time federal employees in Washington, D.C., participating in policy discussions and working on education programs, while up to six Classroom Fellows will work on a part-time basis from their home communities, primarily by sharing public information and facilitating conversation among educators at the state and local level. Fellows will be selected based on their record of leadership,

impact on student achievement, communication skills, and insight from classroom experiences. Applications are due January 29 by 11:59 p.m., and fellows will be named by early summer. For more information, see:

<http://www2.ed.gov/programs/teacherfellowship/>.

### **From other state agencies**

#### **15. Health Department schedules presentation Monday on emergency response and emergency planning**

Please see this message from the Department of Health:

Greg Banner, a former colleague at HEALTH and our current Region 1 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response Regional Emergency Coordinator, has been deployed to Newtown, Conn., to support the response to the Sandy Hook Elementary School event.

Greg is coming to HEALTH to give a presentation to CEPR staff and anyone else who is interested in attending on the response overall, including the planning that occurred to support the school district as they worked to get students back to school this week, and particularly on the mental health response.

This event will occur at 1 p.m. on **Monday** (January 7), in the DOC. Due to limited seating capacity, if you are interested in joining us, we ask that you please pre-register online at <https://ri.train.org/>, Course ID 1040838.

Mr. Banner has also indicated that he is available to give a presentation on emergency responses in school districts or in other settings. His e-mail address is: [gregory.banner@hhs.gov](mailto:gregory.banner@hhs.gov)

### **From other organizations**

#### **16. Barnes & Noble announces the My Favorite Teacher Award 2013**

Barnes & Noble booksellers is accepting nominations for the My Favorite Teacher Award 2013.

Who Participates: Middle- and high-school students.

How to Participate: Students write an essay, poem, or thank-you letter explaining how a teacher has influenced their life and why they appreciate and admire them. Entries should be 500 words or less, in English, and typed on 8.5" x 11" white paper.

Each entry should be submitted with the entry form provided.

A parent or legal guardian must sign the entry form acknowledging that they have read the Official Contest Rules.

Entry forms can be downloaded at [www.bn.com/myfavoriteteacher](http://www.bn.com/myfavoriteteacher).

Submitting Entries: All entries should be provided to your local Barnes & Noble representative by March 1. You may also mail them to Barnes & Noble Warwick, 1350B Bald Hill Rd, Warwick 02886, postmarked by the deadline.

What Students Get: The student who writes the winning essay, poem, or thank-you letter will receive a certificate of recognition, a gift, and be honored at their local store during a ceremony for the winning teacher.

What Teachers Get: The winning teacher will be recognized at an event at their local Barnes & Noble where they will receive a special award acknowledging their achievement, and additional recognition and praise from their community.

Regional winners will each receive a NOOK Tablet(tm) and a \$500 Barnes & Noble Gift Card.

The winner of the Barnes & Noble National Teacher of the Year award will receive \$5,000 and be recognized at a special event at a Barnes & Noble store. The winning teacher's school will receive \$5,000 as well.

Entry forms can be downloaded at  
[www.bn.com/myfavoriteteacher](http://www.bn.com/myfavoriteteacher).

For further information, contact Katie Rendine, Community Relations Manager, Barnes & Noble –Warwick, at  
[crm2159@bn.com](mailto:crm2159@bn.com).

***RIDE will post this field memo on Tuesday, at:***

<http://www.ride.ri.gov/Commissioner/fieldmemos/default.aspx>